

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

FOR

**ADAPTIVE THRESHOLD BASED JITTER
BUFFER MANAGEMENT FOR PACKETIZED DATA**

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ADAPTIVE THRESHOLD BASED JITTER BUFFER MANAGEMENT FOR PACKETIZED DATA

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the field of telecommunications and, more specifically, to managing real-time data packet receipt and playout in the presence of variable packet delays.

Description of the Related Art

10 Real-time digital audio for Internet telephony and playback for World Wide Web browsers employs packetized audio data that is transferred over a network. Each packet contains information that allows the data network to route it to the appropriate destination. Packets from many different transmitters travel sequentially over single connections between routing points (nodes), and packets from the same transmitter (source) may travel different paths through nodes of the network. Consequently, each packet in a sequence of
15 packets from a specific source to a specific receiver (destination) may experience a different delay as it travels through its path through the network. Delay variation also occurs as the packets experience different competing traffic loads at nodes along the network. This variation in delay is termed "jitter."

In addition to the uneven arrival of packets, jitter may also cause out-of-sequence packets. An out-of-sequence packet occurs when the order of the sequence of packets arriving at the destination differs from the order in which the sequence of packets was transmitted by the source. For overall perceived playback
20 quality at the destination, it is preferable to play out voice packets in the correct order at a constant rate and without excessive delays. Hence, network jitter that is not compensated for may significantly degrade the quality of voice service (e.g., in a two-way conversation). One method to compensate for the network jitter is to introduce a jitter buffer at the destination receiver.

25 Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a prior art jitter-buffering system for audio delivery, e.g., voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), and continuous playback at an audio receiver. When an initial (first) packet arrives at the receiver, it is enqueued into a jitter buffer **102** and is not played out immediately. Instead, the initial packet is held in buffer **102** for a predetermined amount of time (referred to as the release threshold) before being forwarded to a decoder **104** for playout. After the first packet is played out, subsequent packets are
30 played out at uniform time intervals.

It is preferable to keep the release threshold at a minimum for two reasons. First, the jitter buffer at the receiver, such as buffer **102**, is of finite length (i.e., it can only hold a fixed number of packets). Therefore, buffer overflow (resulting in loss or dropping of incoming packets) should be avoided. Second, as mentioned above, the total "end-to-end" delay may be perceivable by network users. If the total delay of the
35 voice path exceeds approximately 200 msec, the conversation may be perceived as lagging (having low

quality). Longer delays can noticeably disrupt interactive communications and significantly impair human conversations. Thus, the total end-to-end delay should preferably be less than 200 msec. However, if the release threshold is too low, then "slower" packets will not arrive before their designated playout time, causing buffer underflow and degrading the quality of voice transmission.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Observed network delay and jitter characteristics may change rapidly over time as other connections are set up and taken down in the network. Thus, a jitter buffering method is desirable that can (i) control jitter buffer underflows/overflows at a receiver in a packet-switched network; (ii) provide a simple
10 mechanism to minimize playout delay; (iii) adapt to changing network delay characteristics; and (iv) adjust for other network impairments, such as dropped packets or out-of-sequence packets.

The present invention relates to adaptive jitter buffer management for playout of packetized voice data transmitted over a network. Playout delay is iteratively adjusted based on changing network traffic characteristics by varying the release threshold in a jitter buffer. The adjustment is carried out by evaluating
15 three quantities: (1) integral of the variation in the packet transit time over the network; (2) jitter of the packet transit time; and (3) additional waiting time due to the presence of out-of-sequence packets. This invention reduces negative effects of jitter and/or transmission irregularities, such as late arrival of packets and out-of-sequence packets, while maintaining relatively low playout delay and relatively high quality of service.

According to one embodiment, the present invention is, in a receiver, a method for processing data packets transmitted from a transmitter over a network, the method comprising the steps of: (A) storing each received data packet in a buffer; (B) dynamically updating a first threshold value based on (i) variation in packet transit time over the network and (ii) data packets arriving out-of-sequence at the receiver; (C)
20 performing a comparison based on a waiting time of a data packet and the first threshold value; and (D) transmitting the data packet from the buffer for further processing in the receiver based on the comparison of
25 step (C).

According to another embodiment, the present invention is, in a receiver, a buffer for processing data packets transmitted from a transmitter over a network, wherein the buffer is configured to (A) store each received data packet; (B) dynamically update a first threshold value based on (i) variation in packet transit time over the network and (ii) data packets arriving out-of-sequence at the receiver; (C) perform a
30 comparison based on a waiting time of a data packet and the first threshold value; and (D) transmit the data packet from the buffer for further processing in the receiver based on the comparison.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other aspects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become more fully apparent
35 from the following detailed description, the appended claims, and the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a prior art jitter-buffering system;

Fig. 2 shows a jitter buffer according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3A illustrates operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2 when a new packet is discarded;

Fig. 3B illustrates operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2 when a new packet is an in-sequence packet;

Fig. 3C illustrates operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2 when a new packet is an old out-of-sequence packet;

Fig. 3D illustrates operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2 when a new packet is a new out-of-sequence packet;

Fig. 4 illustrates various parameters describing timing of packets in the jitter buffer of Fig. 2;

Fig. 5 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method of operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2; and

Fig. 6 illustrates operation of the jitter buffer of Fig. 2 according to the exemplary method of Fig. 5.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference herein to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment can be included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of the phrase “in one embodiment” in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, nor are separate or alternative embodiments mutually exclusive of other embodiments. The description herein is largely based on a particular jitter buffer for playing out real-time audio data. Those skilled in the art can appreciate that the description can be equally applied to other jitter buffers and/or other types of real-time data.

Fig. 2 shows a diagram of a jitter buffer **202** according to one embodiment of the present invention. Jitter buffer **202** comprises a first circular buffer **204** (payload buffer) and a second circular buffer **206** (associated table). In one embodiment, buffer **204** is configured to store payloads of the incoming data packets based on receive sequence **208**. Buffer **206** is configured to store real-time transport protocol (RTP) packet header information, such as (i) transmission sequence number, (ii) packet size, and/or (iii) markers and pointers, based on transmission sequence **210**. In an alternative embodiment, buffer **204** may be configured to store the entire contents of packets based on receive sequence **208** and buffer **206** may only contain pointers to corresponding locations in buffer **204** based on transmission sequence **210** decoded from the RTP packet header.

As shown in Fig. 2, receive sequence **208** may be different from original transmission sequence **210**. Therefore, specified memory locations in the associated table (buffer **206**) for storing information of out-of-sequence packets are reserved regardless of the packet's position in the receive sequence (actual packet arrival). For example, as shown in Fig. 2, packets 2 and 3 arrive earlier than packet 1 and are stored in positions **204-1** and **204-2** of buffer **204**, respectively. The out-of-sequence packet 1, which is received after packet 3, is stored in position **204-3** of buffer **204**. However, the RTP packet header information or the

corresponding pointer is stored in positions **206-1**, **206-2**, and **206-3** of the associated table (buffer **206**) for packets 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Therefore, for packet 1, the payload is stored in position **204-3** of buffer **204** and the packet header information or pointer is stored in position **206-1** of buffer **206**; for packet 2, the payload is stored in position **204-1** of buffer **204** and the packet header information or pointer is stored in position **206-2** of buffer **206**; and for packet 3, the payload is stored in position **204-2** of buffer **204** and the packet header information or pointer is stored in position **206-3** of buffer **206**.

In the following description, index i represents the i -th received packet and index $j(i)$ represents the transmission sequence number for the i -th received packet. $j(i)$ may be obtained from the RTP packet header. In general, index i might not be equal to index $j(i)$ because of lost or out-of-sequence packets. i and $j(i)$ are both integers.

Figs. 3A-3D illustrate operation of buffer **206** when jitter buffer **202** of Fig. 2 receives the i -th packet. Define $P(i)$ as the highest transmission sequence number corresponding to the packets that have already been forwarded for playout from jitter buffer **202** to the decoder, such as decoder **104** of Fig. 1, and define $j_{min}(i)$ as the lowest transmission sequence number corresponding to the packets stored in jitter buffer **202** when the i -th packet was received. Typically, the position in the associated table corresponding to the transmission sequence number of $j_{min}(i) = P(i) + 1$ is marked by a read pointer for the next data forwarding action. As illustrated by Fig. 3A, if $j(i) < j_{min}(i)$, then the i -th packet arrived too late for forwarding and may be discarded. A decoder may employ missing-packet interpolation to smooth out the periods of transmission corresponding to lost or discarded packets. In one embodiment of the present invention, special handling instructions might be applied, for example, when $j(i) = j_{min}(i) - 1$. In this case, the i -th packet is not discarded but is either stored or forwarded directly to the decoder just prior to the packet having the transmission sequence number of $j_{min}(i)$.

Figs. 3B-3D illustrate positions of packets within buffer **206** for three situations when $j(i) > j_{min}(i)$ and the i -th packet is stored in jitter buffer **202** for future playout. In these figures, $j_{max}(i-1)$ denotes the largest transmission sequence number corresponding to the packets received by buffer **202** prior to the i -th packet.

Fig. 3B shows a first situation, in which $j(i) = j_{max}(i-1) + 1$. In this situation, the i -th packet is an in-sequence packet and its packet header information is written into the cell of buffer **206** immediately following the cell that stores the packet header information of the packet having the transmission sequence number of $j_{max}(i-1)$.

Fig. 3C shows a second situation, in which $j(i) < j_{max}(i-1)$. In this situation, the i -th packet is an old out-of-sequence packet (i.e., a previously skipped packet). The packet header information of this packet is written into the corresponding cell of buffer **206** located between the cells corresponding to $j_{min}(i)$ and $j_{max}(i-1)$.

Fig. 3D shows a third situation, in which $j(i) > j_{max}(i-1) + 1$. In this situation, the i -th packet is a new out-of-sequence packet (defined as a packet whose transmission sequence number is greater than

$$\Delta t(i) = t(i) - t(i-1) = [a(i) - d(i)] - [a(i-1) - d(i-1)] = \Delta a(i) - \Delta d(i). \quad (4)$$

“Packet Waiting Time,” $b'(i)$, in the jitter buffer is defined as the amount of time between when the i -th packet arrived at the jitter buffer and when it was forwarded to the decoder for playout.

“Variation Measure,” $v(i)$, is a quantity representing variation of the packet waiting time in the jitter buffer. One particular definition of $v(i)$ is given in the foregoing using Eqns. (6) or (9). Other definitions of $v(i)$ may be employed as well without departing from the principles set forth in this specification.

“Out-of-Sequence Error,” $e(i)$, corresponds to the playout delay due to the presence of out-of-sequence packets.

“Packet-Based Threshold,” $T(i)$, of the jitter buffer is a value corresponding to the amount of time between when the i -th packet arrived at the jitter buffer and to when the jitter buffer is ready to forward to the decoder an accumulated sequence of packets starting from the i -th packet.

Fig. 5 shows a method 500 of adaptive jitter buffer management for playout of packetized data received over a network that may be employed for operation of jitter buffer 202 of Fig. 2, according to one embodiment of the present invention. Packets of data are temporarily stored in jitter buffer 202 for eventual transmission to a decoder, such as decoder 104 of Fig. 1. According to method 500, data packets stored in jitter buffer 202 are logically organized into frames, where each frame comprises one or more consecutively received data packets. Data packets in a particular frame are sequentially transmitted (preferably based on their transmission sequence as described in the context of Figs. 2-3) to the decoder when the waiting time of the oldest data packet in the frame exceeds a specified frame-release threshold value, where the waiting time of a data packet may be defined as the difference between the current time and the time that the data packet arrived at the receiver. According to method 500, a new frame of data packets is started when the previous frame begins to be transmitted to the decoder.

In preferred implementations of the present invention, the frame-release threshold value used to determine when to send data packets to the decoder is a dynamic value that is updated every time a new frame is started, based on the current value of a packet-based threshold value that is itself updated every time a new data packet arrives at the receiver. The packet-based threshold value is updated based on a number of different characteristics of the flow of data packets from the transmitter to the decoder in the receiver. In a preferred implementation, the packet-based threshold value is updated based on current measures or estimates of the packet waiting time $b'(i)$, the variation $v(i)$, and the out-of-sequence error $e(i)$ described previously.

According to method 500, when a new frame is started, the frame-release threshold value for that new frame is set equal to the current value of the packet-based threshold. The new frame will eventually be released when the waiting time of the oldest packet in that frame exceeds that frame-release threshold value. In the meantime, the packet-based threshold value will continue to be updated dynamically as each new data packet of the current frame is stored in the jitter buffer, for eventual use in setting the frame-release threshold value for the next frame.

Referring again to Fig. 5, in step **502** of method **500**, jitter buffer **202** is initialized. Initialization refers to the resetting to initial values of all of the parameters used to determine the frame-release threshold value and the packet-based threshold value. During initialization, the frame-release threshold value $Th(k=1)$ for the first frame is set to a predetermined value T_{init} having a typical value of 80 ms. Initialization of other parameters is described below in the context of subsequent steps of method **500**. Three representative examples of when the jitter buffer may be initialized are: (i) a new talk spurt arrives (defined as a sequence of data packets following a sufficiently long period of receiving no data packets); (ii) a silence period occurs (defined as a sufficiently long period of receiving no data packets); or (iii) the jitter buffer is emptied during playout. In describing the operation of jitter buffer **202**, a process period from one initialization to the next initialization of the jitter buffer is referred to as a window. Data packets in a window are further divided into frames. A frame is a set of data packets that are consecutively received at the jitter buffer and organized in the jitter buffer according to their transmission sequence numbers. In general, the description herein is given for a single window. However, it will be apparent to a person skilled in the art that the described method can be extended to multiple windows.

In step **504**, a new data packet is stored in jitter buffer **202**, e.g., as described in the context of Figs. 3A-3D. In step **506**, the current packet waiting time $b'(i)$ is estimated using the RTP packet header information and packet arrival time at the receiver. In step **508**, the variation measure $v(i)$ is calculated using the current packet waiting time value of step **506**.

In one embodiment of the present invention, an estimate, $b(i)$, for the current packet waiting time $b'(i)$ in a frame of jitter buffer **202** and its variation measure $v(i)$ are obtained during steps **506** and **508** of method **500** using recursive Equations (5) and (6):

$$b(i) = \alpha b(i-1) + (1-\alpha)\Delta t(i) \quad (5)$$

$$v(i) = \alpha v(i-1) + (1-\alpha)|b(i) - \Delta t(i)| \quad (6)$$

If the frame for which these values are calculated is a first frame of a window, the following initial conditions may be applied: $b(0) = T_{init}$; $v(0) = 0$; and $t(0) = 0$, where α is a first weighting coefficient. In a preferred implementation of steps **506** and **508**, the value for α is selected as 0.998002. Values for $b(i)$ and $v(i)$ are calculated each time a new packet arrives.

In a different implementation of steps **506** and **508**, an estimate, $b(i)$, for the current packet waiting time $b'(i)$ in a frame of jitter buffer **202** and its variation measure $v(i)$ may be calculated via recursive Equations (7), (8), and (9) :

$$b(i) = \alpha b(i-1) + (1-\alpha)\Delta t(i), \quad \text{if } \Delta t(i) \leq b(i-1), \quad (7)$$

$$b(i) = \beta b(i-1) + (1-\beta)\Delta t(i), \quad \text{if } \Delta t(i) > b(i-1), \quad (8)$$

$$v(i) = \alpha v(i-1) + (1-\alpha)|b(i) - \Delta t(i)| \quad (9)$$

where β is a second weighting coefficient. Preferably, $\alpha = 0.998002$ and $\beta = 0.75$. Using the smaller weighing coefficient (β) for the increasing jitter trend ($\Delta t(i) > b(i-1)$) allows the jitter buffer to quickly adjust

its operation to sudden irregularities in the network traffic, while returning more gradually to a setting corresponding to regular network performance.

In step 510, the out-of-sequence error $e(i)$ is calculated using the RTP packet header information of out-of-sequence packets arriving at the receiver. In one embodiment, the out-of-sequence error $e(i)$ is calculated using recursive Equations (10) and (11):

$$e(i) = c(i) \quad \text{if } j(i) \geq j_{\max}(i-1)+1, \quad (10)$$

$$e(i) = c(i) + (d(i) - d^*(i-1)) \quad \text{if } j(i) \leq j_{\max}(i-1), \quad (11)$$

where $d^*(i-1)$ is the packet departure time for the packet having the transmission sequence number of $j_{\max}(i-1)$ and $c(i)$ is a variable corresponding to the gap in the transmission sequence numbers for the packets currently stored in jitter buffer 202 due to the presence of out-of-sequence packets. The value of $c(i)$ is calculated using recursive Equations (12), (13), and (14):

$$c(i) = c(i-1) \quad \text{if } j(i) = j_{\max}(i-1)+1, \quad (12)$$

$$c(i) = c(i-1) + (d(i) - d^*(i-1)) \quad \text{if } j(i) > j_{\max}(i-1)+1, \quad (13)$$

$$c(i) = c(i-1) - s(i) \quad \text{if } j(i) \leq j_{\max}(i-1). \quad (14)$$

In a preferred implementation of step 510, the initial value for $c(i)$ is chosen to be a small predetermined constant, e.g., 1 msec.

In step 512, the packet-based threshold value $T(i)$ is calculated using the current packet waiting time, variation measure, and out-of-sequence error calculated in steps 506-510. In one embodiment, the packet-based threshold $T(i)$ is calculated using Equations (15)-(17) as follows:

$$T(i) = T_{\min} \quad \text{if } b(i) + \mu v(i) + e(i) \leq T_{\min} \quad (15)$$

$$T(i) = b(i) + \mu v(i) + e(i) \quad \text{if } T_{\min} < b(i) + \mu v(i) + e(i) < T_{\max} \quad (16)$$

$$T(i) = T_{\max} \quad \text{if } b(i) + \mu v(i) + e(i) \geq T_{\max} \quad (17)$$

where μ is a third weighing coefficient and T_{\min} and T_{\max} are preset minimum and maximum buffer release threshold values. The minimum and maximum buffer release threshold values are set and predetermined by, for example, simulation or traffic observation. In a preferred implementation of step 512, $\mu = 4$.

In step 514, the waiting time of the oldest packet in a current frame is compared with the frame-release threshold. If the waiting time of the oldest packet in the current frame is less than the frame-release threshold, processing returns to step 504 to receive another data packet. If the waiting time of the oldest packet in the current frame reaches or exceeds the frame-release threshold, processing proceeds to step 516.

In step 516, data packets of the current frame (i.e., frame k) begin to be transmitted sequentially to the decoder starting with the oldest packet in the frame. Processing then continues immediately to step 518. While the processing of Fig. 5 continues, the steady transmission of packets will proceed independently until all of the data packets of frame k have been sent to the decoder. It is possible (and indeed preferable for continuous playout at the decoder) that step 516 will occur for frame k before all of the data packets of frame

($k-1$) have been sent to the decoder. In this case, the transmission of packets of frame k will start after all of the data packets of frame ($k-1$) have been sent.

In step 518, a new frame of data (frame ($k+1$)) (which becomes the current frame for the next iteration cycle) is started and its frame-release threshold $Th(k+1)$ is set. In one embodiment of the present invention, the frame-release threshold $Th(k+1)$ is set to be equal to the value of the packet-based threshold $T(i)$ calculated according to Equations (15)-(17) in the immediately preceding step 512 (i.e., at the end of the (k)-th frame). After step 518, the buffer returns to step 504 to receive the first data packet for the new frame.

The packet-based threshold $T(i)$ as calculated according to Eqns. (15)-(17) is based on three components:

(1) a first component, $b(i)$, related to the integral of the variation in the packet transit time over the network from when a packet was sent by the source to when the packet arrived at the destination and was enqueued into the jitter buffer;

(2) a second component, $\mu\nu(i)$, corresponding to the jitter (i.e., variation) in the packet transit time from the source to the destination and reflecting the stability of network performance; and

(3) a third component, $e(i)$, corresponding to the additional waiting time necessary to fill the gaps in the associated table due to the presence of out-of-sequence packets.

Fig. 6 illustrates operation of jitter buffer 202 according to one embodiment of the present invention. Jitter buffer 202 comprises a controller 601 and a memory 602. Suppose that Frame 1 is the first frame after jitter buffer 202 is initialized. In one embodiment of the present invention, controller 601 sets the frame-release threshold for Frame 1 ($Th(1)$) to be T_{init} . Each time a new packet arrives at the buffer, controller 601 calculates the packet-based threshold $T(i)$ according to method 500 of Fig. 5. Its value is allowed to fluctuate between a low limit (T_{min}) and a high limit (T_{max}) as the buffer receives incoming data packets. When the waiting time of the oldest packet in Frame 1 (marked "oldest(1)" in Fig. 6) reaches or exceeds $Th(1)$, controller 601 instructs memory 602 to start Frame 2 and sets its frame-release threshold $Th(2)$ to be the value of $T(i)$ calculated at the end of Frame 1. Controller 601 also sets a flag indicating that jitter buffer 202 is ready for service by decoder 604. Decoder 604 addresses jitter buffer 202 to decode and play out the data packets of Frame 1 preferably at a constant rate when it detects that the flag is set.

Jitter buffer 202 accumulates data packets in Frame 2 until the waiting time of the oldest packet in Frame 2 (marked "oldest(2)" in Fig. 6) reaches or exceeds $Th(2)$. If by that time all data packets of Frame 1 have been forwarded to decoder 604, controller 601 sets a flag indicating that jitter buffer 202 is again ready for service by decoder 604. If data packets of Frame 1 are still being forwarded to decoder 604 at the time $Th(2)$ is reached, controller 601 queues the data packets of Frame 2 to be forwarded to decoder 604 immediately after the data packets of Frame 1. Jitter buffer 202 may also start Frame 3 and set its frame-release threshold $Th(3)$ to be the value of $T(i)$ calculated at the end of Frame 2. The described procedure may be repeated for new frames until jitter buffer 202 has to be re-initialized. Jitter buffer 202 may be employed

in a stack of jitter buffers having adjustable release thresholds, wherein decoder 604 services each buffer in the stack when its flag is set.

A jitter buffer operating in accordance with one or more embodiments of the present invention allows for handling of network jitter and/or irregularities, such as late arrival of packets and/or out-of-sequence packets, while maintaining relatively low playout delay and relatively high quality of service. Iteratively adjusting the release threshold in a jitter buffer to changing network traffic characteristics may allow for enhanced buffer service, especially in networks with packetized voice data. Embodiments of the present invention may be implemented using an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) and/or DSP software and can be applied, e.g., to voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service.

While embodiments of the present invention are described with various equations, one skilled in the art would realize that these equations may be scaled, offset, and/or adjusted with additional quantities depending on the specific implementation.

While this invention has been described with reference to illustrative embodiments, this description is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. In particular, the present invention may be implemented for jitter buffers having a structure different from that illustratively used to describe the invention and shown in Figs. 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D without departing from the principles set forth in this specification, including buffer 102 of Fig. 1. Various modifications of the described embodiments, as well as other embodiments of the invention, which are apparent to persons skilled in the art to which the invention pertains are deemed to lie within the principle and scope of the invention as expressed in the following claims. Although the present invention has been described with reference to packetized voice data, it can also be used with other types of packetized real-time data, e.g., video, without departing from the principles set forth in this specification.

Although the steps in the following method claims, if any, are recited in a particular sequence with corresponding labeling, unless the claim recitations otherwise imply a particular sequence for implementing some or all of those steps, those steps are not necessarily intended to be limited to being implemented in that particular sequence.